

Healthy Kentuckians 2010: Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use

Healthy Kentuckians 2010 recommends increasing the number of youth who disapprove of tobacco use and associate harm with use. Involving youth in tobacco prevention advocacy activities is a key element of successful tobacco prevention efforts. Not only do adolescents understand the “customer,” but they also benefit from involvement in leadership and tobacco-free alternative activities.

Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use

Beliefs About Tobacco Addiction

- ✓ Regardless of gender or smoking status, the majority of youth think nicotine is addictive.
- ✓ Students who have never smoked are more likely to believe nicotine is addictive than current smokers.

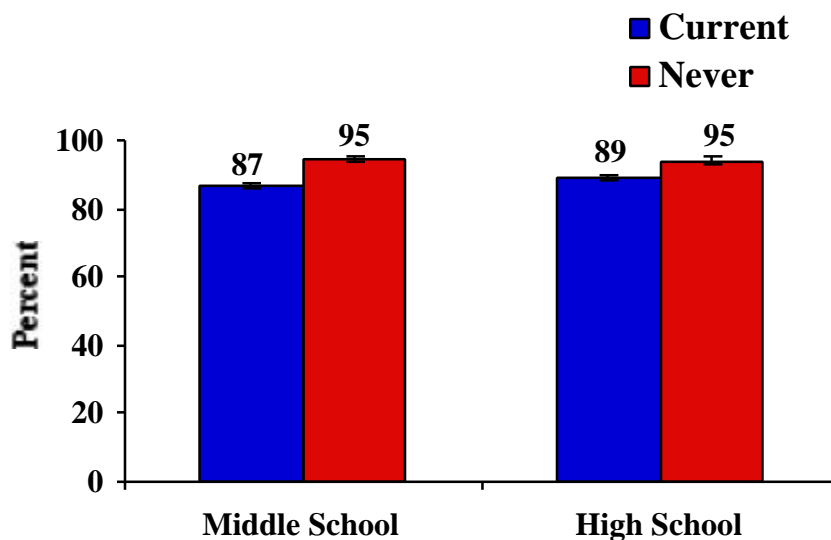


Figure 45. Current and never smokers who think nicotine is addictive just like cocaine/heroin

Background and Significance

Consistent with national data,¹ almost all Kentucky youth believe nicotine is addictive. Similarly, nine of 10 Kentucky legislators believe that nicotine is addictive and that secondhand smoke is harmful to children.²⁵ While it is widely accepted that tobacco is a dangerous product, youth smokers are less likely to think it is addictive than students who have never smoked.

Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use

Beliefs About the Harm of Secondhand Smoke

- ✓ Regardless of smoking status, nearly all middle and high school students believe that secondhand smoke is harmful.

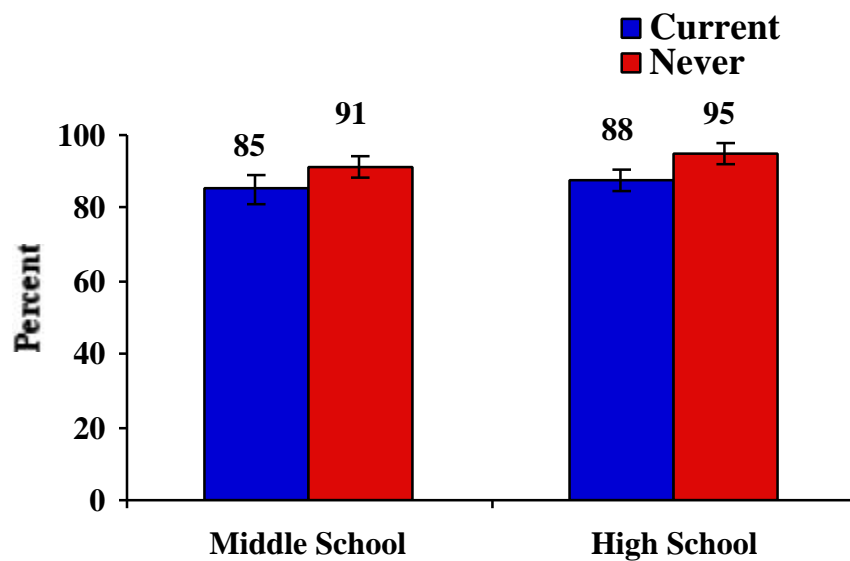


Figure 46. Current tobacco users and never smokers who think secondhand smoke is harmful

Background and Significance

Nationally, 74% of middle school smokers think secondhand smoke is harmful.¹ While a higher proportion of Kentucky middle school smokers believe that secondhand smoke is harmful, national data are similar for high school smokers and never smokers in all grades. Although most students believe secondhand smoke is harmful, most are exposed to secondhand smoke at home and in cars (see Figures 25 and 26). Nonsmokers as well as smokers generally believe that secondhand smoke is harmful and that it should be banned in public places.²⁴

Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use

Think Smokers Have More Friends

- ✓ Nearly one in four middle school smokers and almost one in three high school smokers think smokers have more friends.
- ✓ Current youth smokers are more likely to think smokers have more friends than students who have never smoked.
- ✓ Middle school smokers are more likely to think smokers have more friends than high school smokers.

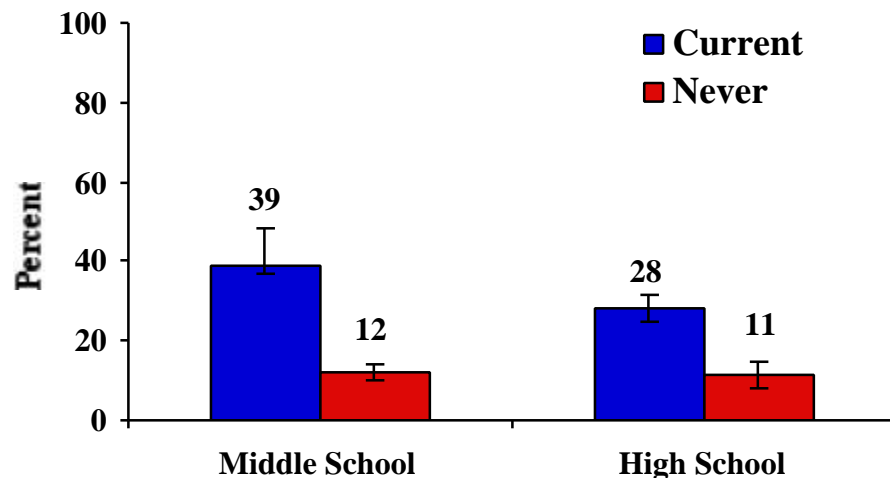


Figure 47. Current smokers and never smokers who think smokers have more friends

Background and Significance

Consistent with national data¹, Kentucky youth smokers are significantly more likely than students who have never smoked to think smokers have more friends. Given that friends are an important part of teenagers' lives, effective tobacco prevention efforts include peer-led programs and public education campaigns that change community norms.

Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use

Think Smokers Look Cool

- ✓ Nearly one in three middle school smokers and less than one-fifth of high school smokers think smoking makes young people look cool or fit in.
- ✓ Current smokers are more likely to think smoking makes young people look cool or fit in than students who have never smoked.
- ✓ Middle school smokers are more likely to think smoking looks cool than high school smokers.

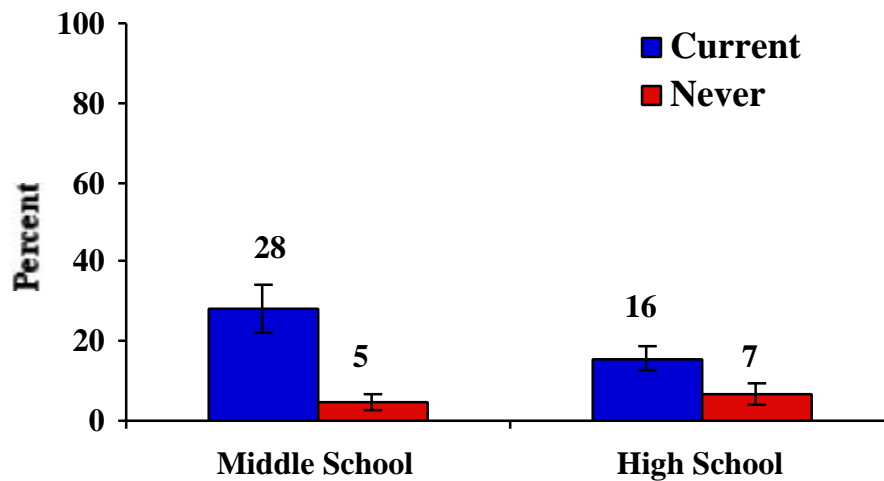


Figure 48. Current smokers and never smokers who think smoking makes young people look cool or fit in

Background and Significance

Similar to national trends,¹ Kentucky youth smokers are significantly more likely than students who have never smoked to think smoking makes young people look cool or fit in. Given that middle school smokers are most likely to believe smoking makes a person look cool, prevention efforts designed to change community norms must be targeted at 6th-8th grade children.

Strategies for Changing Attitudes Toward Tobacco Use Based on CDC Best Practices

Policy Development

- ❑ Strengthen laws to restrict youth access to tobacco products.
- ❑ Adopt state and local laws to prohibit secondhand smoke exposure in public places.

Community Mobilization

- ❑ Encourage youth involvement in tobacco prevention by creating an open, supportive climate.
- ❑ Collaborate with organizations and individuals who work with youth.
- ❑ Foster on-going, supportive community partnerships with community leaders, businesses, representatives of ethnic/racial minority groups, government agencies, schools, places of worship, and the media.

Information Dissemination/Media Advocacy

- ❑ Launch state and local counter advertising campaigns to deglamorize tobacco use and change community norms.

Professional Development and Training

- ❑ Train local tobacco prevention coalition members including youth on effective strategies for changing pro-tobacco community norms.

Surveillance/Evaluation

- ❑ Continue to monitor youth attitudes toward tobacco use and the hazards of secondhand smoke by conducting the Kentucky Youth Tobacco Survey.